To cite this book chapter: Lachhab, Sofia, Šegota, T., Morrison, A.M. and Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. (2023), "Crisis management and resilience – the case of small businesses in tourism", In: M.E. Korstanje,H. Seraphin, S.W. Maingi (eds.), *Tourism Through Troubled Times: Challenges and opportunities of the tourism industry in 21st century*, Bingley: Emerald

Crisis management and resilience – the case of small businesses in tourism

Sofia LACHHAB[1*], Tina ŠEGOTA[1], Alastair M. MORRISON[1] and J. Andres COCA-STEFANIAK[1]

[1] Department of Marketing, Events and Tourism, Faculty of Business, University of Greenwich, Old Royal Naval College, Park Row, SE10 9LS London, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author: S.Lachhab@greenwich.ac.uk

Abstract

Purpose - Crisis management has developed as an established field of scholarly research in tourism over the last three decades. More recently, the concept of resilience has emerged within this body of literature as a longer-term planning process. However, significant knowledge gaps remain, especially regarding the strategic responses of small tourism businesses in destinations prone to repeated crises.

Design/methodology/approach - This chapter reviews the literature related to crisis management and resilience in tourism.

Findings – Key knowledge gaps are outlined and discussed in the context of tourism research related to crisis management and resilience, specifically focusing on research related to small tourism businesses.

Originality – Crisis management and resilience are fields of research that continue to generate a considerable amount of scholarly enquiry in tourism. This is particularly evident with studies on the impacts of terrorism on tourism destinations and, more recently, the short and longer-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism. However, there is very little research related to the role of small tourism businesses in this context, despite their crucial role in the tourism system of destinations around the world.

Keywords

Crisis management; resilience; small tourism businesses.

Introduction

Historically, tourism succumbs to negative events. The latter can be of a political, social or economic nature and could be detrimental to the image of tourism destinations (Glaesser, 2006). These events and their negative consequences have often been referred to as crises (Moreira, 2007) and the management of these crises remains an issue of significant strategic concern to many destinations around the world (UNWTO, 2011).

Although some scholars have argued that reactions to crises tend to be very similar regardless of the type of crisis (e.g., Wilks and Moore, 2003), others oppose this by suggesting that not all crises can be dealt with in the same fashion (Henderson, 2007; Tiernan *et al.*, 2007). For example, crises resulting from natural disasters tend to result in very different impacts to those of a socio-economic nature.

One of the concepts related to crisis management is resilience, which can be broadly interpreted as minimising the negative impacts of a crisis and enhancing the ability to recover from it effectively (Luthe and Wyss, 2014). In tourism, resilience as a concept was introduced by Leep (2008) and defined as the capacity of tourism systems to deal with stressors by maintaining the stability of a tourism-related regional economy. However, some authors (e.g., Becken, 2013) have extended the concept to include flexibility and innovation.

Despite the growing body of knowledge related to crisis management and resilience in tourism, very little research has been done to combine the two concepts to understand how small tourism businesses perceive and deal with crises in destinations. This chapter reviews the existing literature in these fields, identifies current knowledge gaps and offers potential avenues for further research in the context of tourism.

Crisis management

What is a crisis?

The term *crisis* originates from the Greek word *krisis,* which means decision or judgement (Preble, 1997). Scholars have defined this concept as any unplanned event emerging from external circumstances or factors (Kash and Darling, 1988) or an unpredictable event with an unexpected outcome (Coombs, 1999; Bland, 1998; Ruff and Aziz 2003; Lyon and Worton 2007; Prideaux and Laws 2007; Chowdhury and Zuk, 2018; Charland *et al.*, 2021). However, some scholars have also pointed out that each crisis is an exceptional incident, and for this reason, managers should deal with each situation differently (Robert and Lajtha, 2002). Others have emphasised the unknown duration of crises and the loss of control generally associated with them (Moreira, 2007). All in all, a substantial proportion of scholars (e.g., Kash and Darling, 1988; Shaluf *et al.*, 2003; Moreira, 2007; Boin *et al.*, 2018) agree that crises are generally unplanned, unpredictable and carry a substantial element of surprise. Crises have also been interpreted as opportunities for potential success (Fink, 1986; Augustine, 2000; Faulkner and Vikulov, 2001; Clifton *et al.*, 2018; Yang and Huang, 2021; Bridgman and Sliwa, 2021). For instance, Clifton *et al.* (2018) assert that the 2008 financial crisis left a positive legacy on many countries as they implemented policies that developed the resilience of their economies.

The definition of the crisis concept remains contested. For instance, some scholars (e.g., Faulkner and Russell, 2000; Glaesser, 2003) posit that the terms crisis and disaster are so closely related that it is difficult to distinguish between them, whilst others (Al-Dahash *et al.*, 2016; Boin *et al.*, 2018) point out that the terms crisis and disaster are often used interchangeably. Similarly, some scholars interpret crises as mere events, while others argue that they tend to be part of a process. The first group contends that a crisis is an unexpected and unpredictable event that leads to adverse outcomes (Coombs, 2007; Mitroff, 2005; Paschall, 1992; Sawalha *et al.*, 2013; Jaya *et al.*, 2020). The other group states that a crisis is a process that can be predictable (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Pearson and Clair, 1998; Roux-Dufort, 2007; Hopkinson *et al.*, 2021). However, none of the scholars believes that a crisis can be an event and a process simultaneously, which may help produce more precautions that lead to successful crisis management.

Types of crises

Crises can occur due to external or internal sources (Claire and Bettenhausen, 2001). External sources may include economics, politics, technology, ecology, and social forces. Internal sources will tend to involve changes in an organisation's management team, strikes or production problems. Scholars have suggested that a good awareness of the type of crisis to be dealt with helps in identifying the best crisis management approach (Evans and Elphick, 2005; Coombs, 2012). Similarly, De Sausmarez (2007) argues that this knowledge helps build resilience, even if the associated response and communication strategies may differ in each case.

In proposing what is now known as one of the oldest typologies of crisis, Rosenthal and Kouzmin (1993) drew from research findings on two types: man-made and natural crises. Later, James and Wooten (2005) presented a classification of sudden and smouldering crises. An example of a sudden crisis is an unexpected event, like natural disasters and explosions (e.g., earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes). Contrastingly, a smouldering crisis slowly develops and undermines an organisation's future. For example, Thomas and Connolly (2017) studied how two airlines reacted to a smouldering crisis, representing the loss of profitability and clientele in their markets. These studies (Rosenthal and Kouzmin,1993; Wooten, 2005) concur that crises are of two main types. However, a considerable amount of literature presents many other kinds of crises than these two (Lerbinger, 1997; Coombs, 2002; Henderson, 2007; Mat Som *et al.*, 2014, Schiffino *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, crisis typologies should be inclusive and comprehensive so that these events can appear in several forms with varying durations and differing outcomes affecting the organisation, group or individual.

Duan *et al.* (2021) carried out a systematic review of scholarly literature on tourism crisis research published between 1991 and 2020. As a result of this review, the most researched type of crisis was related to security, including terrorism. However, some of the least explored crises included environmental ones and crises in public opinion. Other scholars (e.g., Bernstein and Bonafede, 2011) propose three types of crises: creeping, slow-burn and sudden ones. Whilst a creeping crisis may be characterised by a long incubation period, it can also remain unidentified for a long time (Boin *et al.*, 2020). Mascio *et al.* (2020) argued that these crises could be hard to define and even harder to manage. A present-day example of this type of crisis could be the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Crisis management

Crisis management has been defined as the process of identifying and dealing with a crisis (Kash and Darling, 1988). Pursiainen (2017) took this concept further to suggest that the management of crises tends to be a cyclical process involving the following stages:

- Risk assessment
- Prevention
- Preparedness
- Response
- Recovery
- Learning

There is a substantial body of tourism research related to strategies for dealing with crises (e.g., Cushnahan, 2003; Huang and Min, 2002; Hystad and Keller, 2006; Ghaderi *et al.*, 2012; Morakabati, 2013; Haataja *et al.*, 2018; Mikulic *et al.*, 2018). Although financial and economic crises remain the most studied in the context of tourism (Hall, 2010), research on natural disasters and their implications for travel and tourism at various levels, as well as their substantial capacity to influence destination image, remains a growing body of scholarly activity (Huang and Min, 2002; Reddy, 2005; Baade and Matheson, 2007; Wu and Shimizu, 2020). Faulkner (2011) divided the process of crisis management in tourism into six key phases, namely: (1) pre-crisis, (2) prodromal, (3) emergency, (4) intermediate, (5) recovery, and (6) resolution. The pre-event phase is where contingency plans and evaluation studies are created. It is a stage of finding the information, followed by the prodromal phase where the plans must be activated when the crisis happens, the first response to the crisis. During the crisis, the emergency stage is the actions to protect people and property. Simultaneously, a clear communication strategy occurs in the intermediate period, followed by the recovery stage - restoring infrastructure, facilities, damaged areas, and marketing response. Finally, the resolution stage is when the organisation reviews its actions to learn from the mistakes.

However, a focus of crisis management studies in tourism tends to be on the aftermath of crises (Wang and Ritchie, 2010; Ritchie, 2009; Walters and Mair, 2012; Campiranon and Scott, 2014; Moller *et al.*, 2018; Jiang and Ritchie, 2017) despite scholars emphasising the importance of media coverage and communication in general and their crucial significance while managing

tourism crises (Henderson, 1999; Sigala, 2011; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014; Antony and Jacob, 2019). Table 1 summarises some of the leading research areas in crisis management, mainly based on a review by Ritchie and Jiang (2019) of 142 published scholarly works between 1960 and 2018.

Table 1. Summary of topic areas in the three major stages of a tourism crisis (adapted from Ritchie and Jiang, 2019)

Crisis management stage	Topics
Preparedness and planning	• Proactive crisis management/response • Disaster reaction to reduction, mitigation, and preparedness • Crisis management plan and strategies • Tourism crisis/disaster planning strategies • Influencing factors and predictors of tourism crisis planning • Human resource development in crisis preparation (internal stakeholders) • Crisis leadership (internal stakeholders) • Tourism integration with emergency agency and disaster risk reduction (external stakeholders) • Risk analysis, forecasting tools, pre-assessment and detection • Crisis prevention methods • Risk assessment mechanism • Crisis learning
Response and recovery	• Tourism response and recovery strategies • Government policy response actions • Physical and financial recovery • Tourism reconstruction • Crisis/disaster communication/public relationships • Post-crisis/disaster marketing strategies and campaign • Tourism market recovery • Tourism's misperception/destination image/(re)-positioning • Press response/media and marketing • Marketing message • New market segmentation • Resource management (HR, finance) • Community collaboration • Small business recovery /business resilience • Recovery strategies measurement
Resolution and reflection	• Crisis/disaster learning • Organisational learning • Knowledge management • Destination/enterprise resilience

Frameworks for crisis management

Three frameworks dominate the tourism literature as regards crisis management. Firstly, Ritchie's (2004) three-step framework for managing tourism crises involves developing a crisis plan, implementation and evaluation. Secondly, Heath's (2001) 4Rs framework includes the reduction, readiness, response, and recovery stages. Thirdly, Coombs' (2014) framework for the three stages of a crisis life cycle focuses on pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis activities. In addition, many other frameworks have been developed. For example, building on Faulkner's (2001) initial framework, Ritchie (2004) developed a shorter version that included only three stages: pre-event and prodromal, emergency and intermediate, long-term recovery and resolution. Other scholars developed similar frameworks, often for more specific types of crises. These included Sausmarez's (2004) framework for dealing with national crises, Evans and Elpick's (2005) framework for dealing with terrorist attacks, and several other frameworks for the management of natural disasters (e.g., Huang *et al.*, 2002; Hystad and Keller, 2006; Becken and Hughey, 2013) or public health crises (Ritchie, 2004; De Sausmarez, 2004; Evans and Elphick, 2005; Page *et al.*, 2006; Jin *et al.*, 2019; Le and Phi, 2021).

Most existing frameworks for crisis management tend to examine crises merely at the level of tourism destinations (Mair *et al.*, 2016; Hystad and Keller, 2008), whilst there remains a shortage of frameworks dealing with crises at a more micro level in tourism and especially as regards business management (Faisal *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, none of the existing frameworks appears to address specifically small businesses and how they should deal with crises. This knowledge gap also applies to the responses of tourism businesses to crises and their strategies for recovery (Liu *et al.*, 2017).

Small businesses and crisis management

Many authors exposed an apparent shortage of formal crisis management plans for small organisations (Cushnahan, 2003; Cioccio and Michael, 2007, Kato and Charoenrat, 2018; Spillan and Hough, 2003; Budge *et al.*, 2008; Parnell, 2014, Kurschus *et al.*, 2017). Still, the majority of scholarly research has chosen to focus on examining the effect of crises on small businesses or businesses' reactions to crises (Woodman, 2006; Doern, 2016, Serrasqueiro *et al.*, 2018; Hong *et al.*, 2012; Runyan, 2006; Paraskevas, 2006; Silinevica; 2011, Bartik *et al.*, 2020). Although however, small businesses tend to be more vulnerable to crises (Zeng *et al.*, 2005; Romanescu, 2016), they are essential for local economies to prosper (Tse and Soufani, 2003).

In addition, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are a significant investment for developed and developing countries, given that they noticeably contribute to the overall percentage of production and employment (Yilmaz, 2008). Regardless, how small businesses deal with a crisis in strategy-formulation terms still lacks consensus and research focus (Becken and Hughey, 2013). Maybe the reasoning behind this lacuna lies in that most entrepreneurs and small business managers tend to lack the training to formulate effective crisis management strategies (Olshansky *et al.*, 2012).

With the emphasis on tourism, a considerable amount of research is associated with the crisis management of small tourism businesses (Cushnahan, 2004; Booyens *et al*.,2021; Kukanja *et al*., 2020; Casalino *et al.*, 2019). Again, most studies analyse how tourism SMEs react to a crisis. However, there is a shortage of conceptual/theoretical foundations for understanding effective crisis management for small tourism businesses. Moreover, frameworks with actual plans to help manage a crisis for small tourism businesses are not yet identified.

Despite the rather apparent links between crisis management and resilience (e.g., Faulkner, 2001; Hall *et al.*, 2018; Luthe and Wyss, 2014), tourism research has tended to focus on the latter rather than the former (Prayag, 2018). Even so, once again, the majority of organisational resilience research tends to favour larger organisations to the detriment of small businesses (Orchiston *et al.*, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2013). As scholars point to the need for more research linking crisis management and resilience (Pennington-Gray, 2018), a recent study by Cartier and Taylor (2020) provided further evidence of the links between crisis management procedures and effective resilience responses at a local level. In line with this, the concept of resilience is discussed in further depth next.

Resilience

Defining resilience

Resilience is a concept that has been investigated in psychology, science, medicine (Carthey *et al.*, 2001), sociology, ecology (Holling, 1973), politics (Berkes *et al.*, 2003) and business (Niemimaa *et al.*, 2019; Linnenluecke, 2015). The root of the term is found in the Latin word *resilire*, which refers to the ability of a system to return to its original state after an incident (Hosseini, 2015). Buzz Holling introduced the theory of resilience in the ecology field in 1973, stating that resilience is *"the ability of a system to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters and still persist"* (Alinovi *et al.*, 2010; p. 14). However, scholars in psychology have contested this definition and instead prefer to interpret resilience as a concept that revolves around learning, adjusting and moving forward (Walker, 2019). One of the most common definitions of resilience is Luthar's (2006), defining resilience as a positive adaptation despite adversity. In addition, he suggests that resilience consists of significant adversity and positive adaptation (Luthar, 2006).

Although the debate around how this concept should be interpreted continues (Béné *et al.*, 2017), research related to resilience in the context of tourism is relatively young, initially focusing on market stability (O'Tare and Barrett, 1994) and environmental issues (Nystrom *et al.*, 2000). In that vein, Leep (2008) defined resilience in tourism as the capacity of systems to deal with stressors by maintaining the stability of a tourism-related regional economy. Moreover, some authors (Nelson *et al.*, 2007; Becken, 2013; Cheer and Lew, 2018) extended the concept beyond this definition to include flexibility and innovation as components of dealing with stressors. In addition, resilience has been applied to rural tourism (Perpar and Udovč, 2007), stakeholder management (McDonald, 2009), and environmental and social sustainability (Strickland-Munro *et al.*, 2010; Becken, 2013; Sisneros-Kidd *et al.*, 2019). Recently, Cheer and Lew (2018) stated that tourism resilience is all about retaining tourism activities and the community's quality of life at the right level.

However, sme scholars have criticised resilience research in tourism for its lack of theoretical sophistication and over-reliance on case studies (Lew, 2014). Similarly, there seems to be a lack of research on how the tourism industry deals with political crises (Elisabed *et al.*, 2018; Musavengane and Zhou, 2021). In addition, scholars have argued that resilience is a construct

that applies to individuals and communities (Longenecker *et al.*, 2010). In other words, resilience includes individual and collective capacity (Ungar, 2003). Similarly, other studies have stressed the importance of effective communication strategies in this context (Buzzanell, 2010; Maureira and Stenbacka, 2015; Bertella, 2022).

Hospitality is particularly vulnerable to crises, especially accommodation facilities like hotels (Brown *et al.*, 2018). They are often the targets of terrorism (Korstanje, 2012; Tarlow, 2006; Meshack and Prusty, 2020). Therefore, the development of resilience in hospitality is a critical strategic imperative for practice and research alike (Mayung, 2007; Kwok *et al.*, 2006; Bec *et al.*, 2015; Cochrane, 2010; Melian-Alzola *et al.*, 2020). Figure 1 outlines a framework for disaster resilience explicitly developed for the management of hotels in tourism destinations.

Figure 1. Framework for disaster resilience in hotel management (Brown *et al.*, 2018: P.71).

Resilience frameworks

Resilience research in tourism rests on several different frameworks and models (e.g., Jiang and Ritchie, 2019; Cahyanto and Pennington-Gray, 2017; Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011; Calgaro *et al.*, 2014; Brown *et al.*, 2017; Sharma *et al.*, 2021).

Three theories are seen as fundamental to understanding tourism resilience: adaptive theory, chaos theory and transformation theory (Folke *et al.*, 2010). Reddy *et al.* (2020) used adaptive

theory to propose a framework for developing resilience in post-conflict tourism destinations. Opposite to the adoptive theory, the chaos theory refers to structural change that is random, complex and uncontrollable (Thietart and Forgues, 1995). However, this theory has been criticised because it cannot expose control over a system (Bolland and Atherton, 1999). The third theory is transformation theory. It combines the adaptive and chaotic change concepts (McLennan *et al.*, 2012), and it considers the change to arise through a cyclical pattern, permitting a system to perform multiple transformations to address change (Lichtenstein, 2000).

In turn, adopting the organisational resilience perspective, Kantur and İşeri-Say (2012) categorised the sources of organisational resilience as strategic capacity, contextual integrity, perceptual stance and strategic acting. Similarly, Cahyanto and Pennington-Gray (2017) formulated a conceptual framework that included measurement indicators for destinations to evaluate their response to crises from a destination resilience perspective.

One of the most widely used frameworks for developing resilience is the 4Rs framework created by Bruneau *et al.* (2003). This framework suggests four dimensions of organisational resilience (4Rs): robustness, rapidity, resourcefulness and redundancy. In addition, this framework outlines pathways to resilience beyond physical and organisational systems (Palekiene *et al.*, 2015; Andrew *et al.*, 2013). These include the following:

- Robustness – facing crises whilst minimising damage.
- Redundancy – the extent to which existing systems have a built-in backup in case of a loss or failure.
- Resourcefulness – assessing challenges and deploying the right resources.
- Rapidity – alleviating losses and restoring operations on time.

Small tourism businesses as the future research foci

Small businesses play a vital role in developing the viability and resilience of local economies. In this respect, their competitiveness is key in a fast-changing world increasingly prone to crises (Salazar *et al.*, 2012). Small enterprise competitiveness is defined as the capacity to design, produce and market products/services more appealing than competitors (Chausa, 2003). For an organisation to be competitive is by staying in its surroundings and competing. To do so, the enterprise should establish different operational and strategic functions with efficacy and careful selection (Arrayo and Berumen, 2003).

In the literature, the majority of the studies about SME competitiveness tends to emphasise the factors and the way to succeed (Kamil *et al.*, 2017; Anning-Dorson, 2021). For example, Singh *et al.* (2008) examined the main field of strategy development to enhance SME competitiveness in the universal market. Similarly, Ahmedova (2015) identified the key factors to help develop SME competitiveness and set out the direction of sustainable development using Bulgaria as a case study. From the tourism sector perspective, Dimitrios (1996) looks at some significant strategic weaknesses SMEs face. Also, he believes that small and medium tourism enterprises should develop their competitiveness and target tourist satisfaction to optimise profitability (Dimitrios, 1996). In addition, Abeson (2006) identified the importance of the information acquired by small businesses to help them become competitive.

Linking resilience with competitiveness, Gumasekaran *et al.* (2011) attempted to develop a framework including critical factors that identify the resilience and competitiveness of SMEs. Also, the authors tried to produce additional details about key characteristics linked with resilience and competitiveness shaped by technology and globalisation (Gumasekaran *et al.*, 2011).

However, the literature about small business competitiveness reveals that most studies are from a business and technology perspective (Khorram *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, they focus mainly on strategic developments, key factors, and measuring competitiveness. In this respect, more insight is needed on how tourism SMEs deal with crises and different types of crises, how they build resilience, and how they become competitive in the ever-changing tourism landscape. Moreover, an additional perspective is needed on how tourism SMEs manage crises and build resilience in developed and developing countries. Therefore, it is imperative to distinguish

SMEs in developed and developing countries as tourism is perceived, developed and managed differently concerning countries' overall economic development.

Conclusions

This chapter first reviews the evolution of scholarly thinking related to crisis management in tourism, including key gaps in current knowledge and their implications for tourism research related to small businesses in tourism destinations. The concept of resilience is also reviewed in the context of tourism research. It is posited that, although there are rather apparent links between crisis management and resilience, tourism research appears to continue to treat them as separate topics, particularly in the context of small tourism businesses. This chapter argues that a more holistic approach needs to be adopted to the scholarly enquiry related to how small tourism businesses manage crises and develop resilience due to surviving these crises. In addition, the aim is to encourage future research to focus on creating conceptual/theoretical foundations for understanding effective crisis management for small tourism businesses. Yet, to enable these businesses to manage a crisis, build resilience and become competitive, an actual plan needs to be designed based on SME particularities.

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